

Letter from Taizé

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The "Letter from the Desert" was published during the European Meeting in Cologne. It will accompany the "pilgrimage of trust on earth" until the meeting in Madras.

Letter from the desert

In your darkness a fire is being kindled which will never die out.

If you want to carry a fire right into the darkest nights of humanity¹, will you let an inner life grow, deep within you? A life with neither beginning nor end. A land on fire. The most captivating thing about your existence is the continual unfolding of such a life within. There lies the most incredible human adventure.

If a trusting heart were at the beginning of everything, if it guided your every step, big or small, you would go a long way. You would see people and events, not with anxiety, which cuts you off and which does not come from God, but with a way of looking that is filled with inner peace. And then you would become a ferment of trust and peace even where the human community is torn apart, in its deserts².

Across the earth, so many others, believers and non-believers, are already striving to be a leaven of trust between peoples. Seeking healing for the divisions between the South and the North, between East and West, they stand out as signs of what we were hardly daring to hope for³.

They are there to be seen. They have drawn strength from times of incomprehensible trials. They persevere come what may, despite the unwillingness around them to move forward.

Every human being experiences deserts of fear. But wherever you are, Christ murmurs in you: "Let your heart trust. Rest in peace in God alone. Are you frightened? I am here."⁴

But, you will say, my work, an atmosphere of doubt, my whole past, all pull me so far away from faith in God.

1. One of the dark nights of humanity at the moment is the one which covers the deserts of Africa, where the population of the Sahel, on the southern edge of the Sahara, is suffering from famine caused by drought. It was suggested to Brother Roger to go there. He went with two of his brothers to Mauritania, one of the poorest countries of Africa, to be in contact with those who are suffering, to share whatever possible, and to pray silently. (See the account on pages 4-5)

The "Letter from the Desert" is best read with plenty of time for reflection, rather than rapidly. To understand it better, you could also look at the "Letter from Taizé".

2. Many people think that they cannot influence the future of humanity. But the opposite is true. It is not necessarily only public figures who determine how the world changes. The Virgin Mary did not think, either, that her life was essential for the future of the human family. Without realizing it, humble and poor people of the world are preparing the way to a new future for all.

3. Christians are neither optimists nor pessimists. But they know that history

With some children, Brother Roger will be meeting the Secretary General of the United Nations

The entire human family desires peace, and not war. Those who want war are very few. Those who want to be a leaven of trust between the peoples of the earth are many. This trust is not blind, it sees clearly when those with political responsibility abuse the confidence of peoples.

It is in the name of children who have no voice concerning the threats which hang over their future, that Brother Roger, together with some children, will go to the United Nations in Geneva, July 2, 1985. He will be received by Mr. Perez de Cuellar, Secretary General of the United Nations, to whom he will convey a two-fold appeal:

an appeal for world disarmament
a request to set up a "world-wide authority", along the lines of the intuition expressed by Pope John XXIII shortly before his death.

During the months before this two-fold appeal is presented, young people and old are invited to prepare to gather for prayer, in their towns or villages, on Friday 28, Saturday 29 or Sunday 30, of June.

Between now and the end of 1985, everyone is invited to think over the two appeals, to write about them, and to send their texts to Taizé. Some time will be needed to read and summarise them. Then, those suggestions which take into account the complexity of situations will be submitted to the United Nations and other international organisations.

July 2, 1985

Faith is not a theory. Even at times when God is incomprehensible, what matters most is not first to understand God, but to give your trust.

The day will come when you will be able to find words to express those glimpses you have caught of the indescribable mystery which is God. You can make out its contours. You know him through Christ Jesus who is God in transparency⁵.

The trust of heart which is drawn from faith, does not consist in seeing wonders everywhere, as if it held a magical power.

This trust is often held back deep within you : it needs to rise up through your whole being, to well up from obscurity towards clear awareness.

In everything you do, at every moment, commit yourself to the Holy Spirit, and when you have forgotten, give yourself once again. In the silence of your heart, even in your deserts, the Holy Spirit speaks to you, sometimes in just a single word.

When your hopes are disappointed, would you let yourself be submerged in discouragement and doubt? The Risen Christ is with you. Your trials, the thorns within you, are consumed by his fire; and even the stones in your heart, through Christ can become glowing coals, a light in the darkness.

When you think yourself unloved and not really understood, Christ Jesus asks you continually : "Do you know that I loved you first? Do you love me?"⁶ And you stammer your reply : "I love you Jesus, perhaps not as I would like to, but I do love you."

A life within. Poetry of the Spirit of God. Fulfilment of your longing.

In every person there is a spiritual strength which does not come from them. It can be refused or rejected but it is always there. It is never taken away. It is a well-spring of confident trust planted by the Spirit of the living God. Everything flows from this.

is not just a series of mechanical causes and effects which subject people to a relentless determinism. Trends can be altered, transformed, transfigured. Intuition plays its part in the making of history. Without rejecting the deterministic laws which are fundamental to their research, some scientists today, including agnostics, are discerning limits and gaps : an element which is unforeseeable and unpredictable. The ablest researchers are now presenting the era of determinism with a certain humility. It could be that we will move into a 21st century of deep faith.

4. Psalm 62.2 and Matthew 14.22-33

5. We have eyes with which to see, and sometimes our gaze needs to pause on the face of Christ. The work of some artists enables us to discover faces from the Gospel : Jesus, the Virgin Mary, to such an extent that simply by looking we can glimpse the mystery of God. Sometimes in music what is beyond words leads us into prayer, and the veil is lifted from the inexpressible mystery of God.

6. John the apostle wrote : "This is love : not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins." (1 John 4.10)

Letter to those who think they have been nothing

So many women and men advancing in years think that they have been nothing, that they have accomplished nothing worthwhile. They no longer earn their daily bread and they are faced with a desert of loneliness, as if the only thing left for them was to await death.

You who have reached retirement age, do you realize that when it comes to following Christ there is no age for retiring? The time can now begin for the blossoming forth of the gifts of apostolate which have been placed, to a greater or lesser extent, in every baptised person.

There are women and men advancing in years who have known how to love and how to suffer. They have become capable of listening to others and understanding a lot of their struggles. And God gives us all someone or several people to listen to, not for us to give them advice but to go with them to the well-springs of the living God. For some of you, physical frailty makes it impossible to accompany others except by faithful prayer, and that is of infinite value.

By offering your trust, and in particular to those of the younger generations, you respond to the needs of many young people who have been overwhelmed by the upheavals in society, hurt by broken bonds of affection, or left desolate by abandonments.

Using the intuition gathered throughout your life, you will uncover paths of trust. Until to your very last breath, all is possible.

How wonderful it would be if people came to kiss your worn hands, you who think that you have been nothing and have achieved nothing, and who, without knowing it, enable the unbroken transmission of Christ through the generations.

7. Many Christians, together with non-believers, are working to try to reduce the suffering of others and to be a leaven of trust and peace. This is vitally important. However, if Christians carry only a moral or social message, non-believers could say to themselves : "They are not suggesting anything so very different from what I am already doing." In secularised societies, Christians are called to give signs of God's eternity and to be present at the point where the eternal meets our human community.

8. See 1 Kings 19

Since the European Meeting in Cologne these two letters have already given rise to many suggestions. Young people are copying the "Letter to children" and taking it to groups of children who in turn copy it to the "Letter to those who think they have been nothing" and then the children and young people take it to old people. Some children are preparing a display of drawings in their churches for the time of the meeting at the United Nations, July 2, and then the drawings will be taken to Madras. Let's all look for more ideas.

If we were able to fathom the heart, the wonder would be to discover in the depths an expectation, a silent longing of love.

From the depths of the night of humanity a hidden aspiration is arising. Contemporary women and men, caught up in the anonymous rhythms of plans and schedules, have an implicit thirst for the one important reality : an inner life, signs that point to the invisible.

Nothing else awakens and refreshes our personal inner life like a full, all-embracing common prayer which is meditative and accessible for all age-groups. And the high-point of the prayer will be the singing that never ends and which continues within, even when you are alone.

When the mystery of God is revealed by the simple beauty of signs, and not smothered under an excess of words, then a generous common prayer, far from being monotonous and boring, opens us to the joy of God on earth. People come running from all directions to discover what they had been unconsciously lacking⁷.

And the presence of all age-groups, from the very oldest down to little children, speaks to us. It helps us to grasp that there is just one human family.

Nearly three thousand years ago, a believer named Elijah had the intuition that God speaks to us in the desert and that a silent trust lies at the beginning of everything.

One day Elijah was called to go to the desert of Mount Sinai to listen to God. A storm arose, then an earthquake, then a raging fire. But Elijah realized that God was not speaking to him in these eruptions of nature⁸.

And perhaps for one of the first times in history this clear insight came to be written down : God does not assert himself by violence, he does not communicate through exterior signs of power that frighten. God is not the author of war, disasters, misery, or of any human suffering.

Then everything became calm and Elijah heard God in a quiet murmur. And this striking fact dawned on him : often the voice of God comes in a breath of silence.

Are you aware that God visits you? In a breath of silence, in a whisper, God speaks to you humbly. Simply remaining in silence, in God's presence, to receive the Spirit, is already prayer. God will show you the way. And at times silence can be everything in prayer. ◇

A letter to children

Do you know how much each one of you can be a reflection of God for others, for your family, for old people around you ?

Could you invite those with whom you live to spend a moment of silence together once a week? During this time, even without saying it aloud, everyone would forgive in their hearts the ways in which the others hurt them. And this way, doors of peace will open for you.

Would you like to ask your parents or those who replace them, to trace the sign of the cross on your forehead before you go to sleep or when you are going out ? Then doors of trust would open for you. Remember, God loves you more than you can imagine.

If you can do a drawing to show "trust on the earth" and send it to us, we will take it to Madras. And if you can copy out the "Letter to those who think they have been nothing" and send it to Taizé, we will send it on to older people in other countries. (Please send us your address, too.)

In the Sahel

The plight of these regions is being well covered by the media and we have seen the situation for ourselves. What is less well-known is that there are so many places of hope.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled the desert and converged on vast temporary camps surrounding the capital, where they are now living in tents and shacks. They have practically nothing but they help one another, they share, and do not let someone die of hunger.

In these shanty-towns, there are women and men who, almost without

words, make it possible to sense that God is everything for them. We visited a woman living in a tent. Unable to walk, she was seated on the ground. She raised her arms and with gestures showed that she waited on God for everything. A profound dignity radiated from her deeply wrinkled face.

Among them, there are women and men, often few in numbers, who give themselves daily for the most destitute. We saw four places, working in coordination, where a few women are caring for children and giving medical help. One woman, sheltered from the sun by some canvas, gives first-aid to mothers and to children suffering from malnutrition, right in the shanty-town. Two others run a dispensary that provides fuller help. Yet another works in a state-hospital, with a highly-skilled young Mauritanian doctor, looking after severely-ill children.

The childrens' floor in the hospital was packed. Each mother stays with her child night and day. A ten-year



The day will come when you realize, and perhaps will say, "No, God was not far away, but I was absent. He was with me." And times are given when God is everything.

Discover God's peace in inner silence. He gives it in all situations, even in the rush and noise of a crowd or in the most demanding activities⁹.

If a trusting heart were the beginning of everything, you would be ready to dare a "yes" for your whole life.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about a son who is called to go and work in a vineyard.¹⁰ He answered, "No, I won't." But later on, he came to himself and went. It was "yes".

Another heard the same call and answered, "I will go", but did not go. His "yes" disappeared into thin air.

This Gospel story is about pronouncing a very serious yes, a yes to follow Christ for life.

For some, daring to say yes means responding to Christ's call to the fidelity of marriage.

At the present time when so many families break apart, will you, if you choose marriage, accept the challenge of persevering until your very last breath? Such faithfulness is a reflection of the faithfulness of Christ himself.

So many children have been scarred by abandonments and deeply hurt by separations, to the point of losing the confidence which is essential for life. Family break-ups have wounded the innocence of childhood or adolescence in many young people. Since they were unable to trust those who had given them life, their trust in God has become clouded over. Their hearts are desolate.

Nothing tears someone apart more than the severing of bonds of affection. Disappointment follows, and the sceptical question: "What is the use of living?" Without love, does life still have a meaning?

Broken human relationships are the greatest trauma and the deepest wound of our times.

*Risen Christ, may
your*

*Sometimes we think
But remaining in you
is prayer. And peace
silence is often*

*Then we sense
we advance when*

*when at
at the beginning*

Prayer

9. It is not a question of procuring inner silence at all costs, trying to create a sort of nothingness within you by silencing imagination and thought. It is useless imposing methods on yourself or on others to force inner silence. During prayer, thoughts and images cross your mind. Maybe they are necessary for an inner balance. When prayer is subjected to a technique which then becomes a recipe or system, the person concerned is basing his prayer on his own projections.

10. Matthew 21.28-32

11. In the 4th century, St John Chrysostom wrote: "It is a courageous step to make of your home a little Church". As society becomes secularised, our homes need to hint at the invisible by means of a few simple symbols which remind us of God's presence.

If your home becomes a little house of God, then, rather than existing alongside and separately from the local



old boy had just been operated on for an advanced liver-cancer, his face bore an expression of pleading. Near him, a baby was dying in its mother's arms. Another child was on the road to recovery, but he will be blind for life.

Being close to so many sick children was overwhelming. For a while



our hearts could no longer trust. But all those who care for the children with boundless love, who help the mothers,

who are in the shanty-towns to bring relief to people who urgently need it, and all who persevere faithfully in prayer in such places, are signs that kindle our deepest hopes. From where do they draw the inner strength to persevere, to keep on despite discouragements, and even deserts of the heart? Does God not always speak in the desert?

Operation Hope, a fund which from time to time is re-opened to respond to situations of need, will help to support places of hope in the Sahel during 1985, particularly in Mauritania and in Ethiopia. Donations can be sent to :

UNITED KINGDOM : "Operation Hope", No : 44495090, Bank Account Coutts and Co., Duncannon Branch, 440 Strand, London WC2R 0QS.

IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND : Donations can be sent to the addresses for the LETTER FROM TAIZE, making sure to indicate with payment : "for Operation Hope"

USA : "Operation Hope" c/o Taizé, 413 W. 48th Street, New York, N.Y. 10036

and always,
us.
stand so little.
wherever we are,
o you, O Christ,
g in prayer.
hout our lives,
guides every step,
rt lies
everything.

ger

church, it can be an irreplaceable haven in the parish community. Similarly, movements that make the Gospel present in so many different situations, can also be a haven in the local community. Provided only that everyone comes together, at least once a week, to keep up the liturgical prayer in the churches of their area : a generous, all-embracing common prayer, with people of all age-groups present.

There are regions where, to express a link between little household Churches and the local parish, everyone takes home a candle from the place of prayer at the end of the weekly celebration together.

12. Can an undesired calling from God assert itself to such a point that one day you have to accept it? The prophet Jeremiah wrote this about his own experience : "I said to myself : I will think of God no more, no longer will I speak in his name. But it was as if a raging fire was burning up within me. I struggled to contain it, but I was not able to." (Jeremiah 20)

Will you make of your home a "little church of God", a place of welcome, of prayer, of faithfulness, and of compassion for all those who are entrusted to your care? ¹¹

There are also some whom Christ calls to follow him by the yes of an entire life in celibacy.

When you begin to understand that this yes commits your entire life, you become aware of a great unknown – How can I ever hold true? Who has the inner resources for giving himself in such a way? First there is hesitation and a "no", in a startled reaction that is almost an integral part of our human condition.

But one day comes the surprise of finding yourself on the way, following Christ : a yes has been placed by God's Spirit in your innermost being, in what is known as the human subconscious.

The young person in the Gospel began by saying no. God, who never imposes himself, did not force his lips. But the young person understood that his refusal caused an alienation within him. If he said no, he was no longer being consistent with what was inside him, the Spirit of God, who deep within him was saying yes, with the same yes that was in Mary¹².

By letting this yes rise up from your depths, it is possible for you to say, "I will".

A yes because of Christ leaves you vulnerable. It makes it impossible for you to run away from yourself and from an essential solidarity with others.

This yes keeps you alert. It keeps your eyes open. Could such a yes ever become drowsy or even fall asleep? Could it run away from Christ in the communion of his Body, the Church, which is shaken on all sides, and flee a world ridden with suffering?

This yes for life is fire, and it is a challenge. Let burn the fire that never goes out. And the yes flames up within you.

This yes leaves you vulnerable. There is no other way.

Whenever doubts and the silences of God seem to deepen, will you look to discern the desert flower?

If a trusting heart were the beginning of everything ...

Living as people who are reconciled

By letting an inner life which has neither beginning nor end grow within oneself, a perception develops, an inner vision of that unique communion in the Body of Christ, the Church. Will we discover the way to draw near to the holiness of Christ in the communion of his Body? ¹

We are seeking answers to this question with a view to preparing the World Meeting at Taizé in 1987 ².

Until then, in groups, local churches and movements, it will be essential to take up and explore the following **call to the churches** :

Church, become what you are in your depths : a land of the living, a land of reconciliation, a land of simplicity.

Church, "land of the living", open the doors of an inner life, that everyone be not half-dead but fully alive.

Throw open the doors of joy. Enable us to glimpse something of heaven's joy on earth by means of an all-embracing, meditative prayer, which gathers together people of all ages, and where the shining never comes to an end.

Church, be a land of reconciliation³.

There will never be a widespread awakening of Christians unless they live as people who are reconciled.

Once you are transfigured by a reconciliation which is not put off until later, you will be a leaven of trust and peace between peoples.

Church, be a land of simplicity.

The use of simple means promotes a life of communion, whereas exterior signs of power undermine trust and arouse fear.

Do not forget the hopes of so many persons who are deeply concerned that a way be found to share the world's wealth more equally. The inequality which exists is one of the sources of armed conflict. Be a land of sharing in order to be also a land of peace⁴.

In Madras

The meeting in Madras (late December 1985 - early January 1986) will be a pilgrimage of trust on earth to encourage young people to begin, now already, on a similar search at home in their different countries.

- How can we defuse suspicion and become a leaven of trust and peace between persons and peoples? Rather than submitting passively to all the events that tend to a breakdown of trust, can we instead actually build with such events? How can we look at people and events with an attitude of peace?

- How can we draw from God the resources and strength we need in order to work to reduce suffering in the world? How can we learn the necessary skills and persevere for a lifetime in selfless love?

1. Today, many people are seeking Christ, but take him in isolation, without his Body, the Church. And so, increasingly, one sees Christians splintering into different groups or tendencies where it is mostly those who think the same way who are welcome. If Christ, in the communion of his Body, was not left abandoned as rarely before, we should not commit so much of our energy to bringing young people together and trying with them to be attentive to the holiness of Christ in the communion of his Body. If the Church is not a mystery of communion, how will she be able to get us out of our divisions both old and new?

2. The World Meeting at Taizé will be held in 1987, and not 1986, in order to leave an interval of more than one year after the Madras meeting.

3. These last decades, many Church leaders, both Catholic and non-Catholic, have been wanting a reconciliation. Some have done their utmost and will continue to do so. But they come up against the weight of history which, in some situations, has created a kind of irrational refusal. Now, more than ever, an inner path, that of reconciling within one's own self, seems to be one concrete possibility. It is possible, without ever becoming a symbol of denial for anyone, to reconcile within oneself the thirst for the Word of God, profoundly loved in the Churches which have sprung from the Reformation, and the treasures of faith of the Holy Orthodox Churches, with all the charisms of communion of the Catholic Church seeking to be of one mind and one faith.

4. Regarding sharing, an unprecedented awakening of the Christian conscience is coming about. In the past, Christians seemed to be cut off from the concerns of justice, human rights, and a fair sharing of material wealth. Today, they are attentive to those forgotten by society, and more and more of them are working to change situations for the better. A positive process of simplification has begun regarding the rich material resources which some church institutions possess. In Europe, this is true especially in the south. It is an irreversible evolution which will gradually become widespread.

A pilgrimage of trust on earth

The meeting in Madras will take place at the heart of a contemplative people. The Christians of the East are steeped in a contemplative waiting that goes right back to the dawn of a people imbued with a presence of God.

It is essential that the meeting in India be in no way superficial. It will not be possible to take part without first preparing oneself during a period of several months (please write to Taizé).

At the same time as the meeting in Madras, (late December 1985 - early January 1986), there will also be a EUROPEAN MEETING in Taizé, for those who cannot go to Madras.

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the underlined one is suggested. The reference in italics shows the source of the short reading.

1 Paul wrote : Rejoice always. Pray at all times. Give thanks in all circumstances. *Rom 9.13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5.16-24 Mark 4.35-41*

2 PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
Because Christ himself suffered and was crucified, he is able to help those who suffer temptation. *1 Th 3.1-4; Hebrews 2.14-18 Luke 2.22-40*

3 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted. He saves those whose spirit is crushed. *Deuteronomy 18.15-18 2 Cor 1.18-22 Mark 1.21-28*

4 Lord, you are merciful to all because you can do all things. You overlook men's sins so that they can repent. Yes, you love all that exist. *W 11.22-12.21 Timothy 1.1-2.12-17 Mk 5.18-24*

5 Send out your light and your truth, Lord, let them be my guides. *Is 43.1-8; Zechariah 2.5-9; 1 Tm 2.1-8 Mk 5.25-34*

6 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Take from me your Holy Spirit from me. *Ps 51.7; Zc 2.14-17 1 Tm 3.14-16 Mk 5.35-43*

7 If we labour and strive, it is because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people. *1 Th 4.1-8; 1 Tm 4.4-11 Mk 6.7-11a,12-13*

8 Jesus saw a large crowd and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. *Mt 9.1-13; 1 Tm 4.12-5.2 Mk 6.30-34*

9 I will sing of the love of the Lord forever; my words shall proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. For your love stands firm forever, you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. *Ps 89.9-10 Mk 6.35-44; Galatians 3.26-28*

10 Thus says the Lord : See, I am creating something new, already it is coming to light; can you not see it? Yes, I will make a road in the desert, and my people will sing with praise. *Is 43.18-21 1 Co 9.16-19,22-23; Mk 1.29-39*

11 When they saw Jesus walking on the lake, the disciples were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said : Have no fear ! It is I. Do not be afraid ! *Mt 14.12,13,14 1 Tm 6.3-10 Mk 6.45-52*

12 Paul wrote to Timothy : Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you have been called. *1 Tm 6.11-16 Mk 6.53-56*

13 David prayed saying : All things come from you, O Lord, and we have given you only what comes from your own hand, for we are but strangers before you and pilgrims on this earth. *Chronicles 29.10,13-14 1 Tm 6.17-21; Mk 7.24-30*

14 God is our refuge and our strength, he ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even if the earth is changed. *Ps 46.1-5 1 Ch 29.17-18; 2 Tm 1.1-5 Mk 7.31-37*

15 Paul wrote to Timothy : I remind you to rekindle the spiritual gift which God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

On a quick reading, the book of Jeremiah could seem rather heavy. Too many gloomy words follow one after another. How can Jeremiah put up with having to take such a position in the widening rift between God and his people? How can he accept having to implore both God and his contemporaries at the same time, both apparently in vain?

In this struggle for the salvation of his people, Jeremiah is helpless. "I was like a trustful lamb ..." (Jeremiah 11.19). Indeed he does rebel when he feels mistaken in trusting (15.18, 20.7), but in the long-run he always knows that Another suffers infinitely more than he. Is not God himself "like a stranger in his own land", is he not "like someone bemused" (14.8-9)? Is God not seen to be treated by his people as if he had been disloyal, as if the fault lay with him (2.5)? And did God not suffer at having to "tear up what he had planted", and at "knocking down what he had built" (45.4)?

If we do not sense God's heart beating in the words of Jeremiah, we warp their meaning. These words should not conjure up the image of an authoritarian, vengeful God. God implores. He suffers. He is "deeply moved" for his own people (31.20). Unable to force a response, he can only call : calling them to turn back towards him, calling to trust. It is the people who refuse. They prefer to stay with their ill-founded security, which does not weather the test of time nor the hardship of events, rather than opt for the secureness which God offers from one dawning day to another, but for which it is necessary to accept dependence, like dependence on water (2.13).

Even hope is marked with the humility of God. No restoration in glory in return for all that has been suffered in the past, but something infinitely more beautiful : a New Covenant, a renewal of hearts. From then on, the very deepest in man will be in accord with God's will.

of fear, but a spirit of strength and love and self-control.

Jeremiah 1.4-10 2 Tm 1.6-9a; Mk 8.1-10

Sat 16 The Lord says : I watch over my Word to see it fulfilled.

Jr 1.11-12,17-19 Mk 8.11-21; Ephesians 2.4-6

SUN 17 The Lord makes of his people his bride, and he says of her : I will draw her to myself, I will lead her into the desert and I shall speak to her heart.

Hosea 2.16-17,20-22 1 Co 10.31-11.1 Mk 1.40-45

Mon 18 In Christ Jesus, God has given us his grace. By means of the gospel he has put an end to death, and revealed the life which can never be destroyed.

Jr 2.1-2,5 2 Tm 1.9b-14; Mk 8.22-26

Tue 19 The Lord says of his people : They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, to dig their own cisterns, cracked cisterns that will not hold water. *Jr 2.10-13; 2 Tm 2.1-7 Mk 8.27-33*

Wed 20 ASH WEDNESDAY

Jesus said : When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that no one will know that you are fasting except your Father who is there in secret.

Joel 2.12-13 2 Co 5.20-6.2 Matthew 6.1-6,16-18

Thu 21 Paul wrote : If we have died with Christ, then we shall also live with him.

Jr 3.12-17; 2 Tm 2.8-13 Mk 8.34-37

Fri 22 A servant of the Lord should not engage in quarrels, but must be kind to all and patient in adversity.

Jr 6.14,16; 2 Tm 2.14-24 Mk 9.1-10

Sat 23 A man came to Jesus to ask him to heal his child, and said : I believe ! Help my unbelief ! *Jr 7.1-7 Mk 9.14-29 2 Tm 4.6-8*

SUN 24 After being tempted in the desert, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news from God. "The time has come," he said

"and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news of the gospel."

Genesis 9.8-15 1 Peter 3.18-22 Mk 1.12-15

Mon 25 The Lord says : Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you will be my people. In everything, follow the way that I will mark out for your happiness.

Jr 7.22-25 2 Tm 3.10-17 Mk 9.30-32

Tue 26 Jesus said : Whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me. *Jr 8.4-7; 2 Tm 4.1-5 Mk 9.33-37*

Wed 27 Jesus said : The kingdom of God is like this : A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, when he sleeps and when he is awake, the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how.

Mk 4.26-29; Jr 8.18-23; 2 Tm 4.16-18 Mk 9.38-41

Thu 28 Jesus said : I tell you truly, anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

Jr 9.22-23 Hebrews 1.1-4; Mk 10.13-16

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March

Fri 1 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name.

Ps 106; Jeremiah 11.19, 12.1-3a; Hebrews 2.3b-9 Mark 10.17-27

Sat 2 You are our hope, Lord, why is it that you are like a stranger in this land? Yet you are among us, and we are called by your name. *Jr 14.7-9 Mk 10.28-34 Ephesians 3.17-19*

SUN 3 Who could condemn us? Christ Jesus, who died, who has risen from the dead, stands at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.

Genesis 22.1-2, 9-18 Romans 8.31b-34 Mk 9.2-10

Mon 4 Jesus said to his disciples: You know that the powerful of this world dominate those under them, and make their authority felt. It should not be so with you; instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. *Jr 14.19b-22 He 2.10-18 Mk 10.35-45*

Tue 5 Encourage one another daily, so that none of you become hardened. For we shall come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the confidence we had at first.

Jr 15.16, 18-21 He 3.5-8, 13-14; Mk 10.46-52

Wed 6 Jesus is well able to understand our weakness, for he has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach God with confidence, to receive his forgiveness and his love.

Jr 17.5-8; He 4.12-16 Mk 11.1-11

Thu 7 Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for you are my praise. *Jr 17.14-17 He 5.5, 7-9 Mk 11.15-19*

Fri 8 Jesus said: When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your failings.

Jr 18.1-6 He 6.9b-12 Mk 11.22-25

Sat 9 You have delivered my soul from death, Lord, so that I may walk in the presence of God in the light of life.

Ps 56 Jr 18.18-20a Mk 11.27-33; Eph 4.2-6

SUN 10 The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Exodus 20.1-3; 1 Co 1.22-25 John 2.13-25

Mon 11 Jeremiah said: The word of the Lord has brought upon me insult and derision. And so I said to myself: "I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more". But there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones, which I could not contain. *Jr 20.7-9 He 6.18b-20a; Mk 12.1-12*

Tue 12 To God I call and he saves me, evening, morning and at noon. His peace delivers my soul, for he hears my cry.

Ps 55 Jr 22.1-3 He 7.24-28; Mk 12.13-17

Wed 13 The Lord says: Among my people, no one will need to teach their neighbour, saying: "Know the Lord!" for they shall all know me, from the smallest of them to the greatest.

Jr 23.1-6; He 8.6-12 Mk 12.26-34

Thu 14 The plans that I have for you, says the Lord, are plans of peace and not of harm, to give you a future and a hope. When you seek me you shall find me, for you will seek me with all your heart.

Jr 29.11-14 He 9.11-15; Mk 12.41-44

Fri 15 Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary, but into heaven itself, in order to stand for us in God's presence.

Job 1.1, 6-12; He 9.24, 28 Mk 13.1-8

Sat 16 Jesus said to his disciples: Whenever you are arrested and brought to

trial, do not worry about what you will say; but say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Jb 1.20-22; Mk 13.9-13 Eph 4.32-5.2a

SUN 17 God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

1 Samuel 16.1b, 6-7 Eph 2.4-10 Jn 3.14-21

Mon 18 Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Jb 2.7b-10 He 10.5-10 Mk 13.26-31

Tue 19 Let us hold to our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Jb 6.11-17, 21; He 10.19-25 Mk 13.32-37

Wed 20 Remember the first days when, after having received the light of faith, you stood your ground in the face of great suffering. All your belongings were seized, and you accepted this joyfully because you knew that you had a better and lasting possession.

Jb 12.4-5, 13.1-8 He 10.32-38a Mk 14.1-9

Thu 21 By faith, Abraham responded to the call of God, and set out for the land he was to inherit; and he went without knowing where he was going. *Jb 14.13-17 He 11.1-10 Jn 11.1-5*

Fri 22 Our predecessors in faith acknowledged that they were exiles and strangers on earth. In this way, they made it plain that they were seeking a real homeland. And God has prepared a city for them. *Jb 16.16-22 He 11.13-16; Jn 11.6-16*

Sat 23 Jesus said to Martha: I am the resurrection. The one who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

Jb 19.23-27 Jn 11.17-27 Philippians 3.10-12

SUN 24 Jesus said: I tell you truly, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. *Jr 31.31-34; He 5.7-9 Jn 12.20-33*

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

The epistle to the Hebrews is to be "a word of encouragement" (Hebrews 13.22). It is addressed to Christians who, having already accepted the seizure of their belongings, encounter still more opposition (10.32-34, 12.3-4): they suffer not seeing the promises accomplished, they know that the road is long (3.7-4, 11.8-16). The temptation of discouragement, or even desertion, threatens them.

Among the arguments which the writer puts forward to keep up the courage of his readers, we could pause on the following two in particular:

- Jesus took on the human condition in a real way. He was not in an intermediary state between God and human beings, brushing lightly on human life, leading a life elevated above it. No, he who is truly God (1.5-12), took upon himself the human condition as it had become (2.5-18). This long road that we travel, he knew too, and as really as we know it. He was completely one of us. To have shared our life in this way, he became capable of knowing from the inside what this life with all its threats means for us. Henceforth his whole being is a source of mercy, and even more so because he was faithful to God to the very end (2.17).

- Jesus did not live out this solidarity in a passive way. Being immersed in the struggle of faith and obedience which we all experience (12.2, 5.8), and putting the love of his heart into the struggle, he transformed our human condition from the inside. He regenerated it. This is the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ (9.1). "Sacrificing" does not mean discarding by a useless death-sentence. In biblical expression, the word means: to make sacred, imbued with the holiness of God. "By one single offering, Jesus has achieved the eternal perfection of those who are sanctifying" (10.14): he has led them to God, enabling them from then on to stay in his presence.

If the road is still long for us, "let us fix our eyes on Jesus" who has himself already reached the goal. His presence before God is essentially one of compassion and intercession (4.15, 7.25). In him we have an anchor rooted in the heart of God (6.19).

Mon 25 When my soul is downcast with me, I think of you. Why are you downcast, my soul, and why do you sigh within me? Put your hope in God, for I will praise him yet, O Saviour and my God.

Ps 42; Jb 23.3, 8-12 He 11.17-27 Jn 11.38-44

Tue 26 Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Jb 28.12-13, 23-28 He 11.35b-12.3 Jn 11.45-53

Wed 27 Job said to God: I have been speaking of things beyond my own understanding. I knew you then only by hearsay, now my eyes have seen you.

Jb 38.1-7, 42.1-5 He 12.12-15a; Jn 10.7-15

Thu 28 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for, by being hospitable to some, you have welcomed angels from God without realising it. *Isaiah 53.1-5 He 12.28-13.3-8; Jn 10.16-18*

Fri 29 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, and the Lord has laid upon his servant the faults of us all. Harshly treated, he bore humbly, he did not open his mouth.

Is 53.6-9; He 13.12-21 Jn 14.8-13

Sat 30 Jesus said to his disciples: Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say 'I am going away and I will return to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

Is 53.10-12 Jn 14.27-31a Galatians 2.20

SUN 31 Taking the nature of a servant, Christ became as human beings are. And he humbled himself still further: being obedient to the point of death, and death on a cross. Therefore God has exalted him, and has given him the name that is above all other names.

Is 50.4-7 Ph 2.6-11 Jn 12.12-16